

DRAFT 8/18/05  
9:20 a.m.

## Statement of Governor Haley Barbour Regarding Gas Exploration

“The Mississippi Development Authority is in the process of developing regulations for the exploration and potential development of energy reserves within the State’s coastal waters as directed by the State Legislature.

Because of my interest in protecting the natural beauty and economic well-being of the Gulf Coast, it is my intent to thoroughly evaluate all aspects involved with the implementation of this new law before any final actions are taken.

To that end, I have today taken these steps:

First, I have requested that the Department of Marine Resources conduct a thorough analysis of the potential impact that may be associated with mineral development within State waters. DMR is an agency independent of the Governor’s Office and the primary State agency authorized to enhance, protect, and conserve marine interests of the state. I have asked that Dr. Bill Walker, DMR’s executive director, conduct his agency’s study under the following guidelines:

1. No seismic testing, drilling or mineral extraction will take place on or under the islands of the Gulf Islands National Seashore; as far as I am concerned, the islands are off limits;
2. No drilling will take place within a one mile barrier of the islands;
3. No drilling will take place in the Mississippi Sound, the area between the mainland and the islands, with the exception of the small parcels specified by the Legislature; and
4. Notwithstanding the provisions of the law, no permits will be allowed for the exploration or extraction of oil.

Dr. Walker has agreed to conduct a series of open forums that will provide the public an opportunity to participate in the development of this study. I have asked that he report his agency's findings to me by November 1, 2005.

Secondly, I have directed the Mississippi Development Authority to not finalize any regulations related to mineral development in the State's Coastal waters until after the DMR study is completed and reviewed.

Residents of the Coast have raised a variety of concerns and, frankly, differences of opinion about the effects of implementing the new law. While a considerable amount of misinformation and misconceptions exist, I respect the opinions of Coastal residents, and all of their concerns will be addressed. And, all aspects of the due diligence and risk assessment that will be performed and confirmed before any additional action is taken will be guided by one single priority: protecting the economic and environmental interests of the Coast.

While mineral development in State waters may have many positive impacts in terms of economic development, job creation, and tax receipts which will provide enormous benefits to our schools and tax relief for property owners, exploration will not take place unless and until it can be confirmed that the benefits greatly outweigh potential risks.